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## **‘Das Land, in dem das Proletariat [nur] genannt werden darf.’ The Language of Participation in Heiner Müller’s *Der Lohndrucker***

### **Abstract**

The workers in **Heiner Müller’s** *Der Lohndrucker* (1956-57) lack a language with which to discuss their reality and a voice with which to change it. However, the gaps in their language stimulate creative responses from the **theatre audience**, and thus create the possibility for a participatory democracy to emerge in the auditorium. Previous studies of *Der Lohndrucker* barely discuss Müller’s language, and therefore pass over its productive capabilities. They also only consider the play in relation to the **1953 Uprising** and international matters in 1956, but this article demonstrates the relevance of the **GDR’s** domestic situation in 1956.

**‘Das Land, in dem das Proletariat [nur] genannt werden darf.’ The Language of Participation in Heiner Müller’s *Der Lohndrucker*<sup>1</sup>**

In an article published in the East German literary monthly *Neue Deutsche Literatur* in October 1957, the young playwright Peter Hacks considers both the possibility of writing realist plays for a socialist public and the question of the appropriate form in which to do so. Alongside his recommendation that Socialist Realist theatre must be considered as a new genre altogether, which can be described in terms of neither tragedy nor comedy,<sup>2</sup> Hacks states that the language of the proletariat has both a current shape and necessary direction to follow. Hacks laments the movement from a poetic language, which is able ‘auszudrücken, was das konventionelle Deutsch des Spießers nicht kann’,<sup>3</sup> towards the adoption of ‘Hochdeutsch’ by the proletariat. Nonetheless, he notes that ‘Hochdeutsch’, the language of the former bourgeois rulers of Germany, can be used to meet the ends of the working classes of the German Democratic Republic (GDR) so long as it has any trace of bourgeois niceties purged from it. He writes:

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<sup>1</sup> I would like to thank Dr Laura Bradley and Prof. Peter Davies (both University of Edinburgh) for commenting on drafts of this article.

<sup>2</sup> Peter Hacks, ‘Das realistische Theaterstück’, *Neue Deutsche Literatur* [=NDL], 5 (October 1957), 90-104 (p. 95).

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 100-01.

Die Sprache derer, die einen Staat und eine unvorstellbar entwickelte Technik beherrschen, kann keine andere sein als die des wissenschaftlichen Zeitalters. Natürlich müssen die toten Elemente des Hochdeutschen ausgeschieden werden: die teuren Worte, die Schul-Konstruktionen, die allzu gerade Korrektheit. Es werden Worte aufsteigen, die eine Sache beim Namen nennen, Satzkonstruktionen, welche einfach sind und praktikabel.<sup>4</sup>

In Hack's view a simple, hard language, which grasps the complexity of reality and does away with unnecessary nuances, appears to be the new voice of a working class in charge of a new, socialist state.

Not six months before the publication of this article, Heiner Müller's first play,<sup>5</sup> *Der Lohndrucker*, was published in the May edition of the very same journal.

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid., p. 101.

<sup>5</sup> Questions surrounding the authorship of *Der Lohndrucker* and the degree to which Müller's then wife Inge Müller played a part in the play's composition, have by no means been conclusively answered. In his 1992 autobiography *Krieg ohne Schlacht*, Müller asserts: 'Geschrieben habe ich es allein, und zwar lediglich am Schreibtisch.' Heiner Müller, *Krieg ohne Schlacht. Das Leben in Zwei Diktaturen*, in Heiner Müller, *Werke*, 12 vols, ed. by Frank Hörnigk (Frankfurt/M.: Suhrkamp, 1998-2008) [=W], ix: *Die Autobiographie*, pp. 7-291 (p. 111). Janine Ludwig, however, presents clear evidence to the contrary in: 'Eine Geschichte aus der Produktion. Über die Arbeit am *Lohndrucker* und die Zusammenarbeit von Inge und Heiner Müller', in Peter Kammerer, Klaudia Ruschkowski, and Wolfgang Storch (eds), *Working for Paradise*.

*Der Lohndrucker* depicts the inner workings of a factory in the early days of the GDR, and the dialogue between the workers is simple in terms of both its grammar and its vocabulary. At first glance, the language of *Der Lohndrucker* may be understood to presage Hacks's essay, by giving a voice to the rulers of the self-proclaimed 'Arbeiter-und-Bauern Staat'. Yet, as I shall argue here, the simple language of the workers in Müller's play does precisely the opposite of giving voice to the proletariat: rather, their language is one which cannot fully express the complexities of social reality, and which demonstrates the fact that they have no voice in the governance of their state. In this sense, Müller can be understood to be engaging with contemporary debates in the GDR in 1956-57, concerning the shape Socialism is to take, and the role and form of democracy in the young socialist state. As we shall see, while the language of the workers illustrates the silence of public discourse in the political realm, Müller places his hopes for the emergence of a participatory democracy in the theatre audience.

### **Language and Representation**

With the exception of three scenes in the initial editions of the text, the action of *Der Lohndrucker* takes place in a nationalized factory in the GDR, or 'Volkseigener Betrieb' (VEB), in 1948/49. Production is threatened as the kilns required for manufacturing materials are in desperate need of repair. One mason within the factory, Balke, attempts to repair the kilns under very dangerous conditions so that productivity may continue unaffected, and he develops new, more efficient techniques for doing so. Through repairing the kilns, Balke exceeds production norms, becoming

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Der Lohndrucker. *Heiner Müller Werkbuch* (Berlin: Theater der Zeit, 2011), pp. 46-69. The question of authorship does not however affect the argument of this paper.

the ‘bestes Pferd’ of the factory’s leadership.<sup>6</sup> In increasing production norms, however, Balke also increases the amount of labour required to receive the same wage, causing him and his co-workers to have to work more for less. In the eyes of most of his co-workers, Balke is therefore a ‘Lohndrucker’ and ‘Arbeitverräter’ (126): he receives death threats, a beating, is bullied in the workplace, and efforts are continually made to sabotage his work.

Balke’s story almost exactly matches that of Hans Garbe, a mason at Siemens-Plania in the Lichtenberg district of Berlin, in 1949/50. For his Stakhanovite efforts, Garbe was elevated to the status of ‘Held der Arbeit’, a personification of the idealized consciousness of the new, socialist working class.<sup>7</sup> He became a prominent feature of propaganda to increase productivity, produced by the ruling Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands (SED).<sup>8</sup> He remained a hero throughout an age in which the ‘Aufbau des Sozialismus’, announced by Walter Ulbricht in July 1952, continued to be the ‘grundlegende Aufgabe’ of the East German state;<sup>9</sup> and his story was further projected into national consciousness by literary works such as Eduard Claudius’s 1951 novel, *Menschen an unserer Seite*, and Käthe Rüllicke’s 1952 collection of

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<sup>6</sup> Heiner Müller, *Der Lohndrucker*, *NDL*, 5 (May 1957), 116-41 (p. 125). Because of textual variations between this and subsequent editions, hereafter all bracketed page references in the body of this article will refer to this edition.

<sup>7</sup> Bernhard Greiner, *Von der Allegorie zur Idylle: Die Literatur der Arbeitswelt in der DDR* (Heidelberg: Quelle & Meyer, 1974), p. 65.

<sup>8</sup> Jan-Christoph Hauschild, *Heiner Müller oder Das Prinzip Zweifel* (Berlin: Aufbau, 2003), p. 164. See also: Genia Schulz, *Heiner Müller* (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1980), p. 23.

<sup>9</sup> Wolfgang Emmerich, *Kleine Literaturgeschichte der DDR*, rev. edn. (Berlin: Aufbau, 2009), p. 114.

interviews with Garbe, *Hans Garbe erzählt*.<sup>10</sup> The paradoxical figure of Garbe as both ‘Held der Arbeit’ and traitor of the workforce also provided the substance of Bertolt Brecht’s unfinished *Büsching* fragment, which served as material for the young Müller.<sup>11</sup>

While the case of Balke offers a rich thematic seam, to which much secondary criticism on *Der Lohndrucker* pays close attention,<sup>12</sup> more consideration must be given to the workers as a whole: it is the workforce, above all, which is represented in the play, and which is to be affected by Balke’s actions. This is noted by Helen Fehervary, who writes that the collective stands at the centre of *Der Lohndrucker*, insofar as the text consists of ‘Rekonstruktionen jenes dialektischen Prozesses innerhalb einer einzelnen Brigade [...], in denen sich die Probleme der gesamten sozialistischen Gesellschaft widerspiegeln.’<sup>13</sup> Indeed, from the very start the text clearly questions the structures of political power in the young GDR; a matter which

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<sup>10</sup> Greiner, *Allegorie zur Idylle*, pp. 70 and 78.

<sup>11</sup> See: Wolfgang Storch, ‘Brechts Erbe. Die Erdung’, in *Working for Paradise*, pp. 70-106.

<sup>12</sup> See for example Greiner, *Allegorie zur Idylle*, pp. 60-91; Heinz Hillmann, ‘Arbeiterheld oder Lohndrucker? Arbeiter, Dichter, Ökonomen’, in Paul Gerhard Klusmann and Heinrich Mohr (eds), *Spiele und Spiegelungen von Schrecken und Tod* (Bonn: Bouvier, 1990), pp. 201-28; Jonathan Kalb, *The Theater of Heiner Müller* (Cambridge: CUP, 1998), pp. 57-68; and Georg Wiegand, *Zwischen Auftrag und Verrat. Werk und Ästhetik Heiner Müllers* (Frankfurt/M.: Lang, 1984), pp. 51-74.

<sup>13</sup> Helen Fehervary, ‘Heiner Müllers Brigadenstücke’, in Judith R. Scheid (ed.), *Zum Drama in der DDR: Heiner Müller und Peter Hacks* (Stuttgart: Klett, 1981), pp. 13-45 (p. 17).

is borne out most concretely in the relations between the workers themselves. Almost all of the critical literature examines the text in the context of the first four years of the GDR's existence, from its foundation in 1949 to the 17 June Uprising in 1953,<sup>14</sup> or in the context of international affairs within the Eastern bloc, such as Nikita Khrushchev's so-called 'Secret Speech', delivered at the Twentieth Party Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, and the Hungarian Uprising, both of 1956.<sup>15</sup> Yet such approaches to the text cannot come close to grasping either why these historical or international moments would have been of particular relevance to an East German author in 1956-57 or, for that matter, to the questions on the minds of the East German audiences for whom *Der Lohndrucker* was written. No attention has been given to the considerable internal conflicts within the GDR in 1956, which informed Müller's textual production and the initial reception of the piece. Indeed, it is in the context of internal conflict within the GDR in the later 1950s that we can recognize the issues highlighted by *Der Lohndrucker* and the questions it may have raised for its contemporary audiences: as we shall see, Müller's text exposes an

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<sup>14</sup> See for example Tom Biburger, *Sprengsätze. Der Lohndrucker von Heiner Müller und der 17. Juni 1953* (Pfaffenweiler: Centaurus, 1997); Emmerich, *Kleine Literaturgeschichte*, p. 159; Fehervary, 'Heiner Müllers Brigadenstücke'; Hauschild, *Heiner Müller*, p. 165; Kalb, *Theater of Heiner Müller*, p. 66; Wolfgang Schivelbusch, *Sozialistisches Drama nach Brecht* (Darmstadt and Neuwied: Luchterhand, 1974), pp. 96-110; and Schulz, *Heiner Müller*, pp. 23-7.

<sup>15</sup> See for example Hillmann, 'Arbeiterheld oder Lohndrucker?' p. 215; Theo Girshausen, *Realismus und Utopie. Die frühen Stücke Heiner Müllers* (Cologne: Prometh, 1981), p. 34; and Grischa Meyer, 'Schwarze Bude im roten Oktober', in *Working for Paradise*, pp. 46-69 (p. 68).



immense contradiction within the GDR, a Marxist-Leninist state in which parliamentary democracy and the participation of its citizens have been forsaken in favour of a centralized, ‘sovietized’ form of governance.<sup>16</sup> While this contradiction was already at the heart of the concerns of the protestors of the 17 June Uprising, in 1956 public platforms were being used to attempt to openly discuss this issue explicitly, and for the first time.

The joint issues of power and representation are at the centre of *Der Lohndrucker*. The action takes place at a time in which the nationalization of industry stood at the top of the East German political, social, and economic agenda, and the means of production were being wrested from private enterprise. Even before Müller began work on *Der Lohndrucker*, approximately 85% of all industry in the GDR had been nationalized into VEBs between 1948 and 1956.<sup>17</sup> As the term ‘Volkseigener Betrieb’ suggests, the means of production were now the public possession of the ‘Volk’, that is, the population of the GDR. Now that the Leninist goal of ‘the emancipation of labour from the oppression of capital’ had been partially achieved,<sup>18</sup> there was in theory no longer a hierarchy in place, so that the workers were on an equal footing with those ostensibly above them: as Geschke says to the sceptical Stettiner in the very first scene, ‘Der Unternehmer ist jedenfalls weg’ (116). There is the assumption of equality within the factory: Kolbe advises Geschke in scene 6b, for

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<sup>16</sup> Peter Grieder, *The East German Leadership 1946-73. Conflict and Crisis* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1999), pp. 8-9.

<sup>17</sup> Mary Fulbrook, *A History of Germany 1918-2008. The Divided Nation* (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), p. 134.

<sup>18</sup> V.I. Lenin, *The Deception of the People by the Slogans of Equality and Freedom* (London: Lawrence, 1935), p. 21.

example, ‘Im Direktorzimmer sitzt ein Arbeiter am Schreibtisch. Du bist auch ein Arbeiter und kannst mit ihm reden’ (127). Furthermore, now that the workers apparently jointly own industry, they believe that it is for them to have some say in determining how it is governed, and what the results of their actions may be. In many cases, however, this follows a false logic, epitomized by Lerka’s response when Balke challenges him for using damp bricks in their first attempt to rebuild the kiln:

LERKA: Tempo oder Qualität. Alles können sie nicht haben.

BALKE: Die Minute kostet einen Groschen, Lerka. Aber der Ofen kostet mehr.

LERKA (*nervös*): Wer hat mir was zu sagen? Der Laden hier ist volkseigen, stimmts? Ich bin das Volk, verstehst du. (121)

Lerka’s response betrays a fundamental misunderstanding of his role as an individual worker within a collective: by calling himself ‘das Volk’, he has committed a Rylesian category mistake of the most simple kind, in that he has presumed ‘ich’ to belong to the same logical category as ‘das Volk’, and indeed to be one and the same thing. Yet given the way in which the vocabulary of the VEB functions in giving the workers the impression that a factory belongs to them, it is perhaps most pertinent that Lerka’s confusion of ‘ich’ and ‘das Volk’ arises here. To cite the philosopher Gilbert Ryle himself, the confusion arises ‘from inability to use certain items in the vocabulary’,<sup>19</sup> with the vocabulary in question here being of a new, socialist kind. One thing in particular that Lerka may be said to be misunderstanding is the nature of participation in the GDR, and the degree to which it can be exercised.

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<sup>19</sup> Gilbert Ryle, *The Concept of Mind* (London: Penguin, 2000), p. 19.

As Peter Grieder notes, a ‘democratic way to socialism’ was enshrined in the SED’s charter, yet was received in two conflicting ways.<sup>20</sup> Already during the establishment phase of the SED, the party was split between two views regarding the form democracy was to take in a socialist East German state: on the one hand, the followers of Walter Ulbricht – then Central Committee member and, as of 1950, General Secretary of the Central Committee of the SED – desired the construction of a state modelled on the Soviet Union; on the other hand, Anton Ackermann, likewise a member of the Central Committee, and his camp recognized the need for a socialist state qualitatively different from the USSR.<sup>21</sup> Nonetheless, Ulbricht’s vision for Socialism on German soil won out, and economic, cultural, and social policies were implemented to shape the infant GDR in the image of its protector-superpower. The adoption of Socialist Realism as the state-sanctioned aesthetic for works of art, literature, theatre, and architecture is one such example, although there was less agreement on what constituted Socialist Realism than in the Soviet Union.<sup>22</sup> Furthermore, a series of economic policies were enacted throughout the 1950s to align the GDR’s economy with that of the USSR.<sup>23</sup> Perhaps the most striking example of

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<sup>20</sup> Grieder, *East German Leadership*, p. 10.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> Emmerich, *Kleine Literaturgeschichte*, pp. 119-21. For an example of the variety of approaches to Socialist Realism in the GDR in the 1950s, see: Peter Hacks, Harald Hauser, Joachim Knauth, Hans Pfeiffer, and Hedda Zinner, ‘Das Theater der Gegenwart’, *NDL*, 5 (April 1957), 127-34; and Hans Kaufmann, ‘Ästhetische Probleme der ältesten und der jüngsten sozialistischen deutschen Literatur’, *Junge Kunst*, 12 (1958): 76-80.

<sup>23</sup> Fulbrook, *History of Germany*, p. 162.

Ulbricht's desire to emulate the Soviet Union was the decision to move the deadline for a 10% increase in productivity norms in 1953 from 1 June to 30 June, Ulbricht's sixtieth birthday; even the cult of personality à la Stalin was adopted.<sup>24</sup> This in particular is telling with regard to the lack of participation of ordinary East Germans in directing public policy: on 14 June 1953, Rudolf Herrnstadt, then editor of the official daily newspaper of the SED Central Committee, *Neues Deutschland*, sanctioned the publication of an article criticizing the raising of working norms without the consent of the workers themselves.<sup>25</sup>

In 1956, the year in which Müller began work on *Der Lohndrucker*, the machinery of East German society and politics came to be questioned in the public realm, as public platforms were being used for overtly criticizing the form democracy appeared to have taken in the GDR. After political unrest in Poland and Hungary, in which popular movements gathered under the banners of democratization and liberalization of political, cultural, and informational machinery, demands were being made for democratization and liberalization within the GDR. For example, a gathering in Erfurt called for a parliamentary democracy modelled on that assumed to be enjoyed by West Germans;<sup>26</sup> a public meeting in Marburg allegedly reached a similar scale of unrest as the 17 June Uprising had done three years earlier;<sup>27</sup> and a student demonstration at the Humboldt University in central East Berlin, initially calling for

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<sup>24</sup> Biburger, *Sprengsätze*, p. 111.

<sup>25</sup> Grieder, *East German Leadership*, p. 71.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 108.

<sup>27</sup> Mary Fulbrook, *Anatomy of a Dictatorship. Inside the GDR 1949-1989* (Oxford: OUP, 1997), pp. 188-89.

an end to obligatory courses in Marxist theory and Russian and developing into a demand for greater freedom, was suppressed by a workers' militia.<sup>28</sup>

Ostensibly the GDR was a parliamentary democracy, and much mention was made in public discourse by those within the Politburo of a commitment to democracy. On 29 April 1956, an anonymous article – since attributed to Karl Schirdewan, Ulbricht's then second-in-command in the SED<sup>29</sup> – was printed in *Neues Deutschland*. The article practised self-criticism on behalf of the party. After condemning the lack of collective leadership in the Politburo, the author goes on to criticize the party's failure to employ democratic measures, writing: 'Nicht immer haben wir mit genügender Schärfe auf die konsequente Wahrung der demokratischen Gesetzlichkeit geachtet.'<sup>30</sup> While 'democracy' is not defined in this context, it would be reasonable to assume that for a party committed to Marxism-Leninism, 'democracy' may be defined in accordance with Lenin's own words as 'the equal right of all to determine the structure and administration of the state'.<sup>31</sup> In this sense, democracy would appear to have a particularly participatory colour. Nonetheless, the SED's own brand of democratic centralism privileged freedom of discussion within the upper echelons of state administration, in essence ruling on behalf of the people.

Müller's text questions the degree to which ordinary East Germans were able to participate in politics and, as a result, determine their social and political reality.

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<sup>28</sup> Grieder, *East German Leadership*, p. 112.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., p. 130.

<sup>30</sup> 'Die leninistische Geschlossenheit unserer Partei', *Neues Deutschland*, 29 April 1956.

<sup>31</sup> V. I. Lenin, *The State and Revolution*, in *Essential Works of Lenin*, ed. by Henry M. Christman (New York: Bantam Matrix, 1966), pp. 271-364 (p. 347).

While this aspect has not been addressed by criticism of *Der Lohndrucker*, it is at the centre of the text and reflects a key issue in the domestic situation in the GDR in 1956. In the third scene, the workers are called together during breakfast to elect a new trade union representative for the factory, and the following dialogue ensues:

DIREKTOR: Also ich schlage den Kollegen Schurek vor, ihr kennt ihn  
und er kennt sich aus. Habt ihr andere Vorschläge?

ZEMKE: Schurek ist ein Arschkriecher. *(Ab.)*

DIREKTOR: Hast du einen Vorschlag, Kollege?

GESCHKE *(zu Stettiner)*: Wer Schurek wählt, ist selber schuld.

STETTINER: Willst du machen?

GESCHKE *(schweigt.)*

STETTINER: Unser Recht kriegen wir nie. Hier nicht. Egal, wer den  
Bonzen macht.

EIN ANDERER: Wir können nichts machen.

DIREKTOR: Also, wer für Schurek ist, Hand hoch.

*(Die Arbeiter, auch die Esser und Skatspieler, auch Geschke, heben die Hand, einige mit Frühstücksbrot oder Spielkarte. Wenige Ausnahmen, darunter Karras.)*

KARRAS *(laut)*: Ich kann jetzt nicht, hab die Hand grad in der Tasche.

DIREKTOR *(zählt die Stimmen.)* (120)

In this passage, the workers who oppose Schurek's appointment clearly have some grounds for their opposition, but do not present any reasons. Indeed, it may be asked: what will those who vote for Schurek have to blame themselves for? When asked if he would like to stand for the position, Geschke merely answers with silence, rather than

affirmation or denial. As the longer stage direction indicates, Schurek is in fact elected to the position, as there are only a few workers who do not raise their hands. Even Geschke votes in favour of Schurek, despite having already stated in an aside to Stettiner that he would be opposed to the appointment. This apparently contradictory behaviour appears to be the result of lacking commitment to democratic participation: by and large, they seem to be more interested in eating their breakfast and playing skat than in participating in an election. Nonetheless, to read this antipathy as demonstrating that the workers have interests other than voting for a new union representative may be misleading; rather, it seems to be the result of the workers' disaffection with the electoral process: the workers feel that there is nothing they can do to shape their reality, as the comments of both Stettiner and 'ein Anderer' demonstrate. As the real electorate of the GDR would also have found, there was little that casting a vote could do to determine the outcome of an election, as seats within the East German parliament were pre-allotted and policies pre-determined.<sup>32</sup>

The election in the third scene is particularly significant because of the way in which a 'democratic' process unfolds. In the face of an official line, such as the promotion of one candidate by the person in possession of authority, little can be done other than affirm that choice: while Geschke votes for Schurek, presumably out of resignation, Zemke merely walks away, and Karras claims that he cannot vote, because his hand is in his pocket. The use of the term 'Stimmen' in the stage directions appears, in this light, to approach the ironic. While the German word 'Stimmen' is used in this context to mean 'votes', it also means 'voices', and it is voices which the workers in the VEB lack; they cannot speak up to have their concerns heard or their interests taken into account. Rather, the workers must merely

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<sup>32</sup> Fulbrook, *History of Germany*, p. 209.

be represented by another, in this case by Schurek. This is perhaps out of the authorities' mistrust that the workforce will actually build Socialism if left to their own devices. As the director complains to Schorn in scene 6a: 'Der Arbeiter hat kein Vertrauen zur Partei. Der Faschismus steckt ihm in den Knochen. Wenn du mich fragst: ich trau keinem' (125). As the play unfolds, it becomes clear that Schurek, who is to represent the interests of the workers, has little trust for them himself. After Lerka's oversight in using damp bricks leads to the failure of the repair of one kiln, Schurek is quick to jump to the worst conclusion: 'Das ist Sabotage. Dafür wirst du bezahlen' (124).

The sham election that takes place does, however, have the semblance of allowing for participation from the workers. 'Democracy' figures here as a whitewash, quickly applied, and revealing the texture of what is going on underneath. This was of particular relevance in 1956, when certain sectors of the East German populace were attempting to openly question the extent to which the German Democratic Republic was living up to its name. The image of whitewash is prominent in a poem by Müller from the early 1950s, entitled 'L.E. oder Das Loch im Strumpf', in which Müller tells the story of an activist, Luise Ermisch, who organized efforts to improve the quality of goods produced in a textile factory in 1949:

Platz: eine Strumpffabrik, vor wenig Wochen  
Von Arbeitern Arbeitern zugesprochen  
Die Tünche auf der Wand war frisch  
In der Kantine. [...] <sup>33</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Heiner Müller, 'L.E. oder Das Loch im Strumpf', lines 5-8, in *WI*, p. 40.



Here, the whitewash has been freshly applied, and it is notable that Müller juxtaposes this image with the assertion that the factory had been promised *by workers to* workers. The image calls the very foundation of the VEB and nationalized industry in the GDR into question, namely the idea that the *Volk* owns the means of production: the notion that the factory was ‘Von Arbeitern Arbeitern zugesprochen’ is merely a façade. Furthermore, the very fact that the VEB is promised by a group here places it within an economy of gift-giving, whereby the receiver stands in a symbolic debt to the giver. This is mirrored in the very opening of *Der Lohndrucker*, in which Geschke and Stettiner drink ‘Arbeiterbier’, ‘was der Arbeiterstaat ausschenkt’ (116). Providing a workforce with beer appears to be no more than a cynical means of getting the workforce to believe in the political system and work harder.

The naming of both state and beer using the prefix ‘Arbeiter-’ is part of a rhetorical device employed throughout the play: the word ‘Arbeiter’ occurs some thirty-five times in the dialogue of the relatively short text, mimicking the rhetoric of the state. While Walter Benjamin designated the Third Reich as ‘Das Land, in dem das Proletariat nicht genannt werden darf’ in his essay on the 1938 première of Brecht’s *Furcht und Elend des III. Reiches*,<sup>34</sup> here Müller presents an image of a country in which the proletariat is named with excessive frequency but their rights remain a matter of empty words. While everything is supposedly done in their name, the strict hierarchies involved in statecraft prevent the workers from speaking for themselves and having a voice in their so-called ‘Arbeiterregierung’ (136). Not only

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<sup>34</sup> Walter Benjamin, ‘Das Land, in dem das Proletariat nicht genannt werden darf. Zur Uraufführung von acht Einaktern Brechts’, in *Gesammelte Schriften*, ed. by Rolf Tiedmann and Hermann Schweppenhauser, 7 vols (Frankfurt/M.: Suhrkamp, 1972-1991), II/2, *Aufsätze, Vorträge, Essays* (1977), pp. 514-18.

does Müller mimic the rhetoric of the SED, but he also suggests an awareness amongst the factory leadership of the gulf between the language of the state and social reality. In scene 11, Stettiner,<sup>35</sup> an otherwise unlikely candidate for party membership given his sustained scepticism about the new socialist reality (see, for example, 116), informs the director that he wishes to join the party. In a notably short dialogue, Stettiner utters ‘Arbeiter’ three times, whilst also mentioning his past in the SA; once he has gone, the director turns to Schorn and reveals his familiarity with the usual workings of the language Stettiner has deployed: ‘Zweimal Arbeiterregierung (*blickt auf die Uhr*) in drei Minuten. Das ist zuviel’ (136). Given the discrepancy between the linguistic whitewash applied in the early GDR and the reality it is designed to cover, it is no wonder that Lerka makes the category mistake of confusing himself with the mythological ‘Volk’, said to rule in the state, and consequently loses his job (124-5): the rhetoric of the young GDR makes this an easy mistake to make.

The workers’ inability to participate in politics is further reflected in the style of their language. Not only do we find long periods of silence in the text, but the dialogue tends to be stilted and consists of a simple subject-predicate-object form,

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<sup>35</sup> The name Stettiner may indicate that this character is a migrant from Stettin (now Szczecin), which had been awarded to Poland after the end of the Second World War, and that he had been forced to migrate to Germany. This is of relevance with regard to questions of the ethnic and geographical roots of those forced to comply with the East German authorities in the post-war years, and further reminds us of the animosity towards Germans in the Soviet-occupied lands after the capitulation of the Third Reich, but there is no space to consider this detail further here.

almost completely lacking in subordinate clauses.<sup>36</sup> As we shall see, while this language is shared by the workers, and their fellow proletarians in general, it forbids a direct confrontation with the complexities of reality. In scene 8b, for example, Krüger, an older worker, complains that Balke's plan amounts to no more than exploitation of the workforce. The director replies: 'Krüger, du sagst: Ausbeutung. Du bist dein Leben lang ausgebeutet worden. Jetzt ist dein Junge auf der Universität.' Krüger responds 'Hab ich ihn auf die Universität geschickt? Ich war dagegen', which is followed by a silence, indicated in the stage directions (131). Krüger gives no explanation here for why he is against his son being at university, who is training to be a doctor, as we later discover in scene 12b. Furthermore, he does not directly address questions of exploitation or its relationship to his past or the future(s) of the next generation of GDR citizens. The director's comment offers no direct answer to whether or not Krüger and his colleagues are being exploited, nor does he explain the connection between exploitation and Krüger's son being at university. Rather, much in this scene goes unsaid, leading to disengagement by Krüger, who assents to working with Balke, saying only: 'Wenns sein muß' (131).

The historical situation depicted in *Der Lohndrucker* is one in which contradictions occur regularly: the workers, for example, are said to be living in a state in which they can determine their socio-economic reality, and are emancipated from the exploitative forces of capital; but, as in the case shown above, reality is far more complex and appears to admit exploitation. The language of the workers does not confront this contradiction head-on, rather it is distilled and contains only that which is essential. This arises out of their inability to engage in discourse with one

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<sup>36</sup> Franz Fuhrmann, *Warten auf 'Geschichte'. Der Dramatiker Heiner Müller* (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 1997), p. 71.

another about the contradictory nature of reality. An example of this is the penultimate scene, in which the workers' strike is easily suppressed by the factory leadership. After the majority of the workforce has called for the cancellation of the raised production norm, the following dialogue ensues:

SCHORN (*zeigt auf die zertretene Butter*): Soll die Butter auch weg? (*Pause.*)

EIN ARBEITER: Was hat die Butter mit der Norm zu tun?

SCHORN: Ohne Norm keine Butter.

EIN ARBEITER: Ohne Butter keine Norm.

SCHORN: Wer macht die Preise?

ZEMKE: Uns machst du nicht besoffen.

SCHORN: Das besorgt ihr selber, wie?

DIREKTOR: Geht an die Arbeit. (139-40)

This exchange does not serve as dialogue in a constructive sense, as the speakers merely talk past each other. Neither side gives justifications for what they are saying, or explores the complexities of their view in order to present it to the other side for discussion and consideration. This lack of genuine dialogue demonstrates not only an inability to engage in discourse on the part of the workers, but also a disinclination on the part of the authorities to do so: the director and Schorn are able to issue imperatives to the workers that are obediently followed, bringing an end to the strike. As Müller later believed to have been the case with the 17 June Uprising, and no doubt Hungary and the GDR in 1956, popular opposition has been quelled in such a

way that any opportunity for dialogue between the state and the masses has been lost.<sup>37</sup>

### **Language and Participation**

While the language of the workers in *Der Lohndrucker* serves to illustrate their inability either to confront the reality they inhabit or to partake in changing their reality through discourse, there is a potential for optimism in Müller's text. Some critics have noted that the simplicity of the language in *Der Lohndrucker* is an attempt on Müller's part to avoid the psychologization of the dramatis personae;<sup>38</sup> while this is clearly important, critics have not yet considered how the language of the text might affect the responses of a theatre audience. In a somewhat different vein, Wolfgang Emmerich states that 'Die Sprache ist präzise und gestisch, d.h., die Sprechweise des jeweils Agierenden zeigt, führt vor das für ihn Charakteristische',<sup>39</sup> whereby he notes an affinity between Müller's language and Brechtian *Gestus*. Yet, again, as we shall see, the workers' language in *Der Lohndrucker* appears to be laconic, rather than offering precise, albeit non-psychological, characterizations.

In an article from November 1957, the young East German screenplay writer Lothar Creutz writes that he regards the distillation of the language of the workers as the most promising aspect of the text in comparison to other texts by young socialist playwrights: 'Da wird ferner zur Sache gesprochen, und nur Sache; drei Zeilen

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<sup>37</sup> Heiner Müller, 'Gespräch mit Bühnentechnikern', in *WII*, pp. 44-51 (p. 47).

<sup>38</sup> See for example Fehevary, 'Heiner Müllers Brigadenstücke', p. 21; and Schulz, *Heiner Müller*, p. 24.

<sup>39</sup> Emmerich, *Kleine Literaturgeschichte*, p. 159.

besagen da mehr als in den vorher besprochenen Stücken ein ganzer Akt [...].<sup>40</sup> He goes on to write that the clear goal of Müller's style is one of dividing an audience along lines of those for and those against Socialism.<sup>41</sup> However, while an audience member may indeed be led to affirm or deny Socialism, the text in fact operates in a much more complex fashion.

Müller gives an indication of the role of his target audience in a note at the beginning of the text, the first half of which reads:

Das Stück versucht nicht, den Kampf zwischen Altem und Neuem, den ein Stückschreiber nicht entscheiden kann, als mit dem Sieg des Neuen vor dem letzten Vorhang abgeschlossen darzustellen; es versucht, ihn in das neue Publikum zu tragen, das ihn entscheidet. (116)

A central conflict in the text is one of old versus new, specifically considerations of a capitalist, fascist history in relation to a new, socialist reality. This prefatory note demonstrates that Müller posits a role in this conflict for the theatre audience as a collective body. Furthermore, he sets out the rhetorical stance of the play: rather than teaching an audience what to think about what is being presented on stage, he implies that the material in the play is there for the audience members to consider independently. This serves the aim of creating a new public which is qualitatively different from the section of the GDR public depicted in the text.

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<sup>40</sup> Lothar Creutz, 'Anfänge sozialistischer Dramatik', *Theater der Zeit. Beilage*, 12 (November 1957), 2-8 (p. 8).

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

But, we may ask, how does Müller see this new public coming about? What he is seeking to achieve is to make his audience productive, and the notion of ‘Produktion’ is indeed key to understanding Müller’s aesthetic in *Der Lohndrucker*. When he published *Der Lohndrucker* along with a selection of his texts under the title *Geschichten aus der Produktion* in 1974,<sup>42</sup> Müller was not referring solely to industrial production. As Janine Ludwig notes, the term ‘Produktion’ must also be read in the Marxian sense of ‘die Produktion des Menschen im Übergang aus seiner Vorgeschichte in seine Geschichte’;<sup>43</sup> that is, producing people who are no longer the objects of history but its subjects, possessing the agency to act in history and alter it. In an East German interview given in 1966, Müller states:

Wenn bei uns [in der DDR] etwas gebaut wird, ein Kraftwerk oder ein Wohnblock, dann wird mehr gebaut als nur ein Kraftwerk oder ein Wohnblock; jede Arbeit bei uns produziert auch Produktivität bei denen, die sie tun, und das Thema wäre die Freisetzung von Produktivität und der Lust an der Produktivität bei Leuten, die hier arbeiten.<sup>44</sup>

For Müller, the building of Socialism cannot begin with people who are already good, committed socialists, but these people must become so. He writes in 1953: ‘Die das neue Neue schaffen, sind noch nicht neue Menschen. Erst das von ihnen Geschaffene

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<sup>42</sup> Heiner Müller, *Geschichten aus der Produktion I* (West Berlin: Rotbuch, 1974).

<sup>43</sup> Ludwig, ‘Eine Geschichte aus der Produktion’, p. 108.

<sup>44</sup> Heiner Müller, ‘Gespräch mit Heiner Müller’, in *W10*, pp. 7-34 (p. 9).

formt sie selbst.<sup>45</sup> That is, the new person can only be produced by what s/he produces. According to Müller, one can become a new person through production because the act of producing itself generates new consciousness. *Der Lohndrucker* offers a potential route out of the impasse: Müller's text grants the possibility for the production of a new audience through the potential for myriad responses to what is depicted. With each individual spectator having the opportunity to produce his/her own response to the play, this act of production is to produce a new collective of individuals, existing within a shared discursive space yet punctuated by difference. This potential audience, therefore, is not homogeneous or committed to the party line, but internally varied, opening the space for dialogue. Rather than saying everything that could be said, albeit in a condensed form, the workers' language produces a degree of silence through what is left unsaid; this may be filled by the audience member, allowing for numerous, nuanced readings of the reality depicted on stage.

In the passages cited above, we can see that the workers' dialogue is more about what is not said than what is said, and provokes more questions than it answers. In the case of the resolution of the strike scene, for example, according to the prevailing economic model both sides of the argument are indeed right to some extent: while a new working norm needs to be established to increase productivity in order to push down the price of consumer goods, without the foodstuffs required for the maintenance of a human body there is little labour that can be achieved without killing off the workforce. Yet, as noted above, both sides here merely talk past each other, and do not engage in discussion of the matters at the heart of the conflict. There is a chasm between these two dialectically opposed positions which invites consideration from an audience. No doubt an audience member from the time of *Der*

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<sup>45</sup> Heiner Müller, 'Sieg des Realismus', in *W8*, pp. 52-6 (p. 54).



*Lohndrucker*'s stage debuts in Leipzig and Berlin in 1958 would have experienced both the hardship of the early 1950s and the relative success of the SED's economic policies: according to the East German women's magazine *Die Frau von heute*, the price of butter fell by a staggering 79% from 65DM to 14DM per 500g between November 1948 and July 1950;<sup>46</sup> and by the end of the 1950s, the GDR's economy was beginning to challenge that of the Federal Republic.<sup>47</sup> In neither developing their arguments further nor giving full consideration to the other side of the argument, the workers open the floor for debate amongst the audience members with respect to the methods employed to reinvigorate the economy and the place of the working public in it.

Müller's text enhances the potential productivity of the workers' language further by regularly combining it with silence. At the beginning of scene 8d, for example, while Balke is working in the kiln, Kolbe brings him his lunch and says, 'Gegen den Ofen war der Panzer ein Kühlschrank', to which Balke replies, 'Der Ofen ist kein Nazitank. Du kannst aussteigen' (132). This is followed by an indication in the stage directions that Kolbe 'schweigt'. Here, the language is pared down, stating very simply some differences between sitting in a Nazi tank and working in the Socialist kiln, but the insertion of silence after the exchange encourages the audience to begin considering the histories of the workers in question: both were former Nazis and fought on the side of capitalism and fascism, and indeed, only a few scenes previously, Schorn confronts Balke with the accusation that he denounced Schorn for

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<sup>46</sup> Cited in Alexander Weigel and Grischa Meyer (eds), *Spuren. Texte, Bilder, Dokumente zu Der Lohndrucker von Heiner Müller. Dokumentation I* (East Berlin: Deutsches Theater, 1988), p. 14.

<sup>47</sup> Fulbrook, *History of Germany*, p. 164.

sabotage in a grenade factory (127-8). Yet now both are apparently committed socialists, playing their part in the foundation and establishment of Socialism. Furthermore, whereas one was compelled to fight in a tank, Balke seems to advocate the position that it is possible to get out of the oven. However, this raises the question whether he really means that this is a question of choice. And, if it is down to choice, is he claiming that one can depart from the building of Socialism? If so, one clearly has to depart from the GDR altogether, as former union representatives (120) and party secretaries have already done (125).

Some commentators have noted that the use of pauses and scene changes in *Der Lohndrucker* is an epic means of encouraging input from an audience.<sup>48</sup> Yet the productivity of the dialogue's simplicity tends to go unremarked. Müller's technique of stripping language down to its simplest parts is not only mimetic of the situation of the East German working public in the early GDR, and their lacking opportunity to participate in politics, but also a dialectical strategy for engaging the audience. In this sense, it borrows from a Brechtian epic form of theatre which, in Brecht's words, 'macht den Zuschauer zum Betrachter, aber [...] weckt seine Aktivität'.<sup>49</sup> Benjamin

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<sup>48</sup> See for example Fuhrmann, *Warten auf 'Geschichte'*, p. 72; and Hans-Thies Lehmann, 'Ästhetik des Textes – Ästhetik des Theaters. Heiner Müllers *Der Lohndrucker* in Ostberlin', in *Spiele und Spiegelungen von Schrecken und Tod*, pp. 51-62 (pp. 53-6).

<sup>49</sup> Bertolt Brecht, 'Anmerkungen zur Oper *Aufstieg und Fall der Stadt Mahagonny*', in *Werke. Große kommentierte Berliner und Frankfurter Ausgabe*, ed. by Werner Hecht, Jan Knopf, Werner Mittenzwei, and Klaus-Detlef Müller, 30 vols (Berlin and Weimar/Frankfurt/M.: Aufbau/Suhrkamp, 1988-1998), XXIV: *Schriften 4* (1991), pp. 74-84 (p. 78).

describes the productivity of the epic aesthetic in a way which appears fitting for *Der Lohndrucker*:

Das epische Theater seinerseits rückt [...] in Stößen vor. Seine Grundform ist die des Chocks, mit dem die einzelnen wohlabgehobenen Situationen des Stücks aufeinandertreffen. Die Songs, die Beschriftungen im Bühnenbilde, die gestischen Konventionen der Spielenden heben die eine Situation von der andern ab. So entstehen überall Intervalle, die die Illusion des Publikums eher beeinträchtigen. Diese Intervalle sind seiner kritischen Stellungnahme, seinem Nachdenken reserviert.<sup>50</sup>

Benjamin's concern here is with examples of epic theatre that make use of placards announcing stage directions and include songs, which are not to be found in the text of *Der Lohndrucker*. Nonetheless, what he says of the creation of intervals that are reserved for the audience's reflection holds true of Müller's text. Rather than creating a stage of illusion, Müller's language constantly disturbs any sense of illusion in order to invite the audience to enter into the play and supply their own thoughts to fill the discursive silence left by the workers regarding the reality their language cannot address.

We can see from the initial reception of *Der Lohndrucker* in performance that the precision of Müller's language was indeed praised for its productive capabilities. Notwithstanding the different performance techniques adopted in its premiere in

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<sup>50</sup> Benjamin, 'Das Land, in dem das Proletariat nicht genannt werden darf', pp. 515-16.

Leipzig at the Städtisches Theater, directed by Günter Schwarzlose, and its first Berlin production at the Maxim Gorki Theater, directed by Hans-Dieter Mäde, both in 1958, reviewers tended to emphasize the role of the language in their experience of the play. W. Stie, writing for the East German *National-Zeitung*, found that the greatest strength of the Leipzig production lay in the ‘schonungslose Offenheit, mit der die Widersprüche innerhalb des Betriebes wie in den handelnden Personen bloßgelegt werden’.<sup>51</sup> Crucial to this insight is that Stie is writing about the strengths of the text itself and then adds that Schwarzlose succeeded in transposing the text to the stage: the simplicity of the language is a major contributing factor in the text’s ability to lay the contradictions within it bare. Reviewers of Mäde’s production tended to agree that the precision of the language engaged spectators in a great degree of intellectual participation. Peter Edel found it to be ‘ein Genuß für den Mitdenkenden, die Dialektik solcher pointierten Dispute zu verfolgen, die mitunter in ein paar Zeilen den Gehalt einer ganzen Lektion konzentrieren’;<sup>52</sup> while for Helmut Ullrich, the concentration of the language of the play ‘ermöglicht es viele Fragen zu stellen, weil immer auch eine Antwort gefunden wird’.<sup>53</sup> Notably, Ullrich found the answers to be already within the play, rather than left open to the audience; yet he also found that too many questions were asked without answers being provided. Despite this, the latter quotation demonstrates that the brevity and condensation of the language in

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<sup>51</sup> W. Stie, ‘Eine Woche der Uraufführungen’, *National-Zeitung* (East Berlin), 30 March 1958.

<sup>52</sup> Peter Edel, ““Der Lohndrucker” und “Die Korrektur””, *BZ am Abend* (East Berlin), 8 September 1958

<sup>53</sup> H[elmut] U[llrich], ‘Der Arbeiter der Gegenwart auf dem Theater’, *Neue Zeit* (East Berlin), 24 September 1958.

Müller's text was an integral part in creating a work which held more doors open than it closed. In doing so, the textual means for inviting audience participation, largely born out in the language, appear to have created the potential for multiple responses to the production.

### **‘Das neue Publikum’**

As Müller's preface to the piece states, *Der Lohndrucker* has nothing to teach and instead leaves the audience to generate a lesson or a meaning. Furthermore, as the above discussion of the workers' language illustrates, the text's openness and potential productivity lie chiefly in the simplicity and directness of this language. Müller's text lays the contradictions of the new socialist society bare to an audience and, rather than reaching sure conclusions in the dialogue, or, for that matter in the plot, invites the audience to consider what they have been shown and relate it to their reality. In turn, Müller points to the possibility for discussion about this reality, through which it may be changed. The public depicted in *Der Lohndrucker* cannot change their social reality because they have no voice with which to do so: their vocabulary neither fits the reality nor is it sufficient to describe it; and they are prevented from participating in politics by a system of representation that further serves to remove their voices.

The ‘neue[s] Publikum’ (116) whom Müller addresses is simultaneously the same public as that depicted on stage, and formally very different. Through presenting an audience with a text laden with contradictions and numerous different ways of responding to these, *Der Lohndrucker* offers that audience the possibility to become a participatory public, unlike the purely represented public that attempted to speak in 1956: the public in the theatre can question their reality, but there is no single way of doing so. In finding their own individual voices, audience members participate in

politics by discussing their reality with their contemporaries, and changing the shape of GDR politics.

Indeed, according to two individual spectators of Mäde's production, writing on the same day in November 1958, the play opened a very real space for dialogue, in which audience members grasped every available opportunity to discuss what they had seen on stage. One audience member notes that the audience was captivated right until the end of the performance.<sup>54</sup> This impression is confirmed by another spectator, who commented that, while the audience was silent during the scenes themselves, between scenes there was a great deal of discussion within the entire audience. The author of this letter also emphasized that the journey home after the performance was filled with lively discussion.<sup>55</sup> While these sources illustrate the degree to which Mäde's production encouraged dialogue within the audience, they are very limited in terms of what they can tell us about the form and content of the discussions generated among spectators, or about the extent to which the audience was reacting to the specific questions asked by the silence of the text. Nevertheless, the fact that dialogue stands in the foreground of these responses is important.

In this sense, we may be able to read Müller as partaking in the so-called 'Literatur der Selbstverständigung', albeit ahead of his time: according to the East German literary theorist Dieter Schlenstedt, this way of understanding the role of a particular form of literature emphasizes the act of communication with and between members of the public. The importance of discussion in the process of a public's

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<sup>54</sup> Letter from K.L. to the Artistic Directorship of the Maxim Gorki Theater, 30 November 1958, Maxim Gorki Theater Archiv [MGTA] Lfd Nr. 38/39, unpaginated.

<sup>55</sup> Letter from F.C.S. to the Artistic Directorship of the Maxim Gorki Theater, 30 November 1958, MGTA Lfd Nr. 38/39, unpaginated.

‘Selbstverständigung’ appears, for Schlenstedt, to have emerged with the Seventh Writers’ Congress of the GDR in 1973,<sup>56</sup> and, furthermore, is situated within a 1970s discourse of democracy in the GDR: as he writes in 1979, ‘[e]s handelt sich um den Entwurf eines demokratischen Wirkungskreises sozialistischer Literatur’.<sup>57</sup> This discourse of democracy and literature is one in which discussion stands at the very centre, and it demonstrates the aspiration, in the words of Schlenstedt,

daß in [der Literatur der Selbstverständigung] eine Möglichkeit liegt,  
durch den Austausch verschiedener Erfahrungen zu mehr  
Gemeinsamkeit zu kommen, daß sie als ein kollektiver Vorgang zu  
sehen ist, [...] ein Prozeß, der die ganze Gesellschaft betrifft und in dem  
sich unsere gemeinsame Wahrheit bildet.<sup>58</sup>

In recognizing literature as a collective activity and one which encourages dialogue, the ‘Literatur der Selbstverständigung’ therefore plays an invaluable role in the formation of a social reality in which everyone can participate; although Schlenstedt’s concern is with East German prose in the 1970s, this comes close to characterizing

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<sup>56</sup> Dieter Schlenstedt, *Die neuere DDR-Literatur und ihr Leser. Wirkungsästhetische Analysen* (Munich: Damnitz, 1980), p. 37. This work was initially published in the GDR in 1979 as: Dieter Schlenstedt, *Wirkungsästhetische Analysen: Poetologie und Prosa in der neueren DDR-Literatur* (East Berlin: Akademie, 1979). See also: Dieter Schlenstedt, ‘Prozeß der Selbstverständigung. Aspekte der Funktionsbestimmung in unserer neueren Literatur’, *Weimarer Beiträge*, 22 (December 1976), 5-37.

<sup>57</sup> Schlenstedt, *Die neuere DDR-Literatur*, p. 41.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 37.

Müller's position as a dramatist in the late 1950s. Nonetheless, while Schlenstedt prizes the building of consensus through being given information by a responsible author,<sup>59</sup> and therefore posits a potential end of dialogue in commonality, the case of *Der Lohndrucker* is somewhat different: Müller purposefully revokes any such authorial responsibility; and 'Gemeinschaft' is far from the intended outcome of the play.

In an interview from 1985, Müller states: '[e]in geschriebener Text ist irgendwann oder wird als beendet verabschiedet. Aber ein Gespräch kann man erst beenden, wenn man nicht mehr sprechen kann, also wenn man tot ist.'<sup>60</sup> Although here Müller is discussing the relative merits of the interview format with his interlocutor, it can help us to grasp the potential efficacy of the aesthetic of *Der Lohndrucker*. Even though it is a text which appears to be finished, it is written for an audience, and primarily for the instigation of dialogue with and within an audience. Furthermore, it is not closed, but open to the active participation of individual audience members. To this extent, the dialogue activated by *Der Lohndrucker* is never-ending; and in this light, it is not surprising that Müller decided to direct his own production of it at the Deutsches Theater thirty years after its initial composition. Just as the late 1950s were a time when demands were being made in the Eastern bloc for democratic reform, so too was the latter half of the 1980s, when Mikhail Gorbachev's reform programmes of *glasnost* and *perestroika* in the Soviet Union sowed the seeds of hope for democracy and freedom of speech in Eastern European states, including the GDR. The language of a people in a land in which they could

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<sup>59</sup> Ibid., p. 67; and Schlenstedt, 'Prozeß der Selbstverständigung', p. 9.

<sup>60</sup> Heiner Müller, '[Erst mal: das Gespräch damals – aus einem Jahr Abstand...]', in *W10*, pp. 769-89 (p. 769).



only be talked about once again became a means of getting them to try to do the talking themselves and actively participate in a democratic public sphere.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> For some documentation of this 1988 production, see Akademie der Künste (ed.), *Der Lohndrucker. Dokumentation 2* (East Berlin: Deutsches Theater, 1988).